



## **\*\*\*Media release\*\*\***

### **Master cardiologist makes a flying visit to Austin Hospital**

Internationally-acclaimed expert interventional cardiologist, Dr Etsuo Tsuchikane, flew in to Austin Hospital to treat five of the Cardiology Department's most complex patients.

Each patient suffered from a completely blocked heart artery known as a chronic total occlusion. A completely blocked coronary artery can cause chest pain and is sometimes a reason to perform bypass surgery.

The blockages are often rock hard. They are very difficult to get across with the cardiologist's usual guidewires, balloons and stents. Many patients are referred for coronary bypass surgery or treated with powerful medications to thin the blood and to relieve the chest pain.

Dr Tsuchikane and his team at the Toyohashi Heart Centre in Japan have devised highly skilful techniques to treat chronic total occlusions. Using custom designed wires guided by X-rays, Dr Tsuchikane gradually works the wires through the blockage then inserts a metal stent to hold the vessels open.

"The most important skill in this kind of procedure is patience," said Dr Tsuchikane.

While his basic methods are the same as those used worldwide, Dr Tsuchikane uses quite stiff wires and other support catheters to get across blockages. He has honed his tactile sense of the way the procedure feels. In the wrong hands, the risk of perforation of the blood vessel wall is high.

Dr Tsuchikane joined senior Austin Health interventional cardiologists Dr Robert Chan and Associate Professor Omar Farouque to treat 73-year old patient Mr Peter Orpin.

After four years on medication to thin his blood, patient Mr Orpin felt that his angina attacks were worsening. He underwent two interventions last year at other Victorian hospitals that failed to clear the blockage from his coronary artery.

"I could feel the pain travel right around my chest. I had to lie down for half an hour before I could continue what I was doing," he said. "Once I had to stop the car and lie down on my back in the park."

Patients with chronic total occlusions make up approximately 10-15 per cent of patients seen in Austin Hospital's cardiac catheterisation laboratory. Because of the complexity, the procedures are often less successful and come with higher

complication rates. Patients experience greater exposure to radiation and longer procedure times.

Dr Tsuchikane and Dr Chan succeeded in clearing the blockage from Mr Orpin's artery with a balloon but his artery was hardened beyond being able to accept a stent.

In three of the other cases, the team succeeded in placing stents to open up the blockage.

"One was an impossible case," said the Japanese master. "We tried but could not cross the blockage."

Director of Cardiology, Assoc Prof Farouque said that the most complex patients had been assembled for Dr Tsuchikane's visit.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for our patients to receive the best treatment in the world," he said. "It was valuable for our own cardiologists to learn some of the finer points of his technique. Cardiologists from interstate also flew in to observe Dr Tsuchikane's work."